

# THE STYLE OF PLAY UNDER A MAGNIFYING-GLASS

The structure of soccer is the same for each coach. To win a game you must defend if your team isn't in ball possession and attack when your team has the ball. In between those two there are the moments in which players must change over (transition). The "coaches' influence" is visible in the choice of the team organization/formation and how the basic tasks (offense, transition and defense) are divided between the players. What determines the choice for a certain style of play?

## ORGANIZATION AND FORMATION

A coach must ask himself the following question: how are we going to play as a team? Should we dominate and take lots of initiatives, or is it better if we await certain developments and react to an error by the opposition? Or is there an in-between that is more suited? Several factors are of influence in this decision making process. We will discuss them one by one and offer examples.

### 1. THE VISION AND CULTURE OF THE CLUB

When certain professional clubs have a home game, the home crowd wants to see an aggressive team and not a team that doesn't take any initiatives. In the Netherlands it is expected that teams play attacking and dominant soccer. This is completely different than, for example, in Italy. The soccer culture there expects teams to absorb the opposing team with a tight, defensive organization and then to counter-attack and try to get that one goal needed for the win. The public appreciates a well executed counter-attack much more in Italy than in the Netherlands.

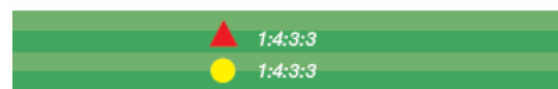
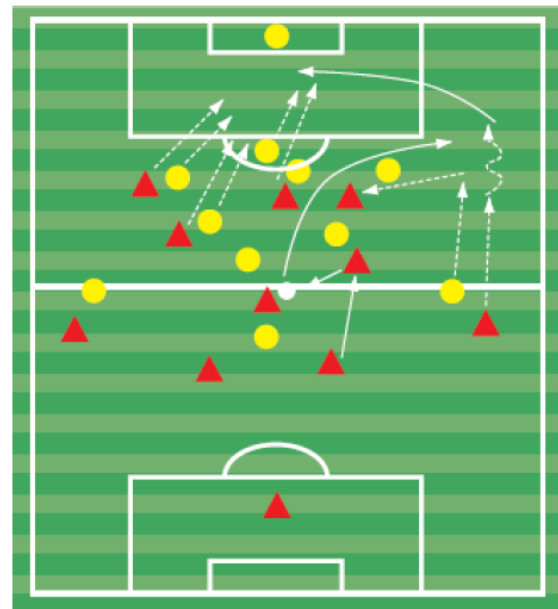
### 2. THE VISION OF THE COACH

Some coaches introduce the so-called "new realism" when their teams are promoted to a higher league. The objective is to stay in the higher league and not be relegated and how that objective is achieved isn't important. The choice for a certain style of play hinges upon the opposition, the availability of

players, the standings, etc. In short, it all depends on the "reality of the day". There are also coaches who will always take the initiative, even when their teams don't have the ball. Their teams must pressure the other teams immediately when they lose the ball.

### 3. THE QUALITIES OF THE PLAYERS

If you elect to play with outside wingers you must have the players with the abilities of a real left and right forward. If not, you might as well choose a different playing style. Or, you can come up with a variation: the player, who plays on the wing, creates space for a fullback who supports in the attack (see drawing).



Basic offensive tasks right winger and right fullback.

Right fullback:

- supports forward along the touch-line
- crosses the ball

Right winger:

- creates space for supporting right full-back
- searches for space for the "second ball" (coming out of the box)

#### 4. THE QUALITIES OF THE OPPOSITION

The game analysis of the next opponent is focused on finding the weak and strong points of that team. Subsequently, the coach can think of ways to fight the strong points and to take advantage of the weaker points.

fields. Thus the choice for a certain style of play depends on a large number of factors. As a coach you must realize which factors should play a role to come to a conscious and successful choice. The above mentioned can hopefully help you in that process.



#### 5. DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PLAYERS

This aspect is mainly important when working with youth players. Each age group has its own characteristics. To be able to teach youth players how to play better soccer as a team very often the choice is made to play 1:4:3:3. The positions on the field are arranged better and the basic tasks are easier to train than in a 1:4:4:2 or a 1:3:5:2.

#### 6. DEVELOPMENTAL-STAGE

When players turn U16-U17 you can confront them with various team organizations/formations. It is also logical that if you want your players to play high-pressure defense on the opponent's half, they first must master the basic principles of defense ("make the field small").

#### 7. THE CIRCUMSTANCES

A team that wants to "dictate the play", must adapt to the condition of the field (uneven, tall grass, frozen field, muddy etcetera.). Perhaps the choice for a certain style of play will be influenced in the future by the increasing number of artificial turf